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## **NMSA Research Summary #7 Middle Level Licensure (1996)**

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**Question: What is the status of middle level teacher education and licensure/certification?**

### **The problem**

The number of middle schools in the nation has increased significantly in recent years. For example, the number of 5-8 and 6-8 middle schools has increased from 2,434 in the 1970-71 school year to 8,164 during the 1995-96 academic year while the number of 7-9 junior high schools decreased from 4,711 to 1,037 during this same period. When all separately organized public middle level schools are considered, their number currently exceeds 12,000. However, this substantial increase in middle schools has not been accompanied by a similar increase in the number of institutions offering special middle level teacher preparation programs and states requiring special middle level licensure that recognize the importance of teachers of young adolescents having the specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be highly successful (McEwin & Dickinson, 1995).

Instead, many states offer elementary school licenses and high school licenses that include overlaps with the middle grades, (e.g., K-8, 6-12). This practice has resulted in most middle level teachers being prepared with a focus on content areas only or on teaching young children. Even in schools with structural components of middle schools in place, such as common planning time and adjacency of rooms to enable team teachers to plan together, full benefits of programs designed specifically for young adolescents can not be realized without specially prepared middle level teachers. The lack of professionally prepared teachers stems from a limited number of specialized middle level preparation programs, special graduate courses in middle level education, and advanced degree programs for future leaders of middle level reform (NCATE-Approved Curriculum Guidelines, 1991).

### **States with middle level licensure (certification/endorsements)**

The nature of teacher preparation programs is driven by state licensure requirements. In a 1992 national licensure study, 33 states reported specialized middle level teacher licensure/certification (Valentine & Mogar, 1992). Previous surveys reported full certification and/or endorsement in 28 states in 1987, 15 states in 1978, and two

states 1968. Despite the steady but slow growth rate, many states do not require teachers to hold middle level licensure to teach in the middle grades. Overlapping licensure regulations enable teachers trained at elementary or secondary level to teach middle grades. McEwin and Dickinson (1995) noted, "For example, one state's current plan includes the following options: grades pre k-3; 1-8, 4-8, 7-9 and 7-12. Given these choices, while considering future employment possibilities, many prospective teachers select programs leading to licensure in grades 1-8 or 7-12 because these grade spans make them more 'marketable'" (p.11).

In 1991, states with middle level licensure/endorsements held 82 percent of all middle level teacher preparation programs. Fifty-seven percent of the special middle level teacher preparation programs were located in only five states, all of which required special licensure for middle level teaching: Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia (McEwin, 1992).

### **The implications of non-certified teachers in middle schools**

To be highly successful, many excellent teachers of young adolescents had to "learn on the job" using trial and error techniques, requiring experimentation and persistence. Such practices require time. Coupled with the resistance of other teachers and personnel, reform efforts have moved slowly, and many schools are unable to be more responsive to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents.

### **Special middle level professional preparation**

The 1991 NMSA position paper on professional certification states the essential elements of a middle level teacher education program as follows:

1. Thorough study of the nature and needs of early adolescents
2. Middle level curriculum and instruction to include teaming, advisory, and exploratory preparation
3. Broad academic background, including concentrations in at least two academic areas at the undergraduate level
4. Specialized methods and reading courses
5. Early and continuing field experiences in good middle schools.

The full success of the national movement to make middle level schools more developmentally responsive is dependent upon licensure that requires teachers of young adolescents to demonstrate the special knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful. Since, in large part, teacher preparation programs, are led by licensure

requirements, states that design and implement licensure regulations lead teacher preparation institutions to establish and maintain specialized programs for the professional preparation of middle level teachers.

## **Enclosures**

- "Middle Level Teacher Licensure" from McEwin, C.K., & Dickinson, T. S. (1995). The professional preparation of middle level teachers: Profiles of successful programs. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Valentine, J. S., & Mogar, D. C. (1992). Middle level certification-An encouraging evolution. *Middle School Journal*, 24(2), 36-43.
- "Middle Grades Teacher Preparation: A Historical Perspective," from McEwin, C. K., Dickinson, T. S., Erb, T. O., & Scales, P. C. (1995). A vision of excellence: Organizing principles for middle grades teacher preparation. Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence and National Middle School Association.
- McEwin, C. K. (1992). Middle level teacher preparation and certification. In J. L. Irvin (Ed.) *Transforming middle level education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Scales, P. C., & McEwin, C. K. (1996) The effects of comprehensive middle level teacher preparation programs. *Research in Middle Level Education Quarterly*, 19(2), 1-20.

